

## **2022 Notable south zone subsistence efforts and observations.**

In the last week of April 2022, LEI received a report of a black bear found dead on a beach on San Fernando Island just outside Craig, AK. The bear was reported to be shot in the head and not salvaged. Additionally, the same complainant stated two does were also found in the same area with gunshot wounds and no meat salvaged. Alaska Wildlife Troopers (AWT) was notified.

On the North end of POW most contacts were made at roadside pullouts as hunters glassed or prepped their gear. Most hunters up there are guests of lodges and utilize lodge vehicles driving from Whale Pass to El Cap and up to Red Bay looking for bears. Most of these contacts were informational and explaining the regulations to nonresidents.

On the South side of POW most bear hunting efforts take place in the area of Kasaan Bay, with 12 Mile Arm Cabin and Polk Inlet Cabin being utilized as base camps. Most of these hunters rent boats and cruise the beaches. Marine patrols as a solo operator are quite difficult for enforcement which may reflect the number of contacts made and ultimately violations detected. On these solo marine contacts, an officer is tasked with simultaneously tending to the patrol vessel, the suspects vessel, keeping an eye on the chart plotter/radar for hazards, safe depths, floating marine debris and also trying to manage officer safety as the hunters are going through gunnells, bags and other places someone might keep their license and tags or attempt to conceal evidence of a potential crime.

A lot of bear hunting effort occurs in the early morning or in the evening, with policies limiting vessel operations at night this creates an almost necessity for overnight patrols which can extend fuel consumption and range while keeping officers within our marine policy.

One significant bear issue occurred August 8, 2022, while patrolling Rush Peak RD, an officer located an illegally harvested black bear. Black bear season on Prince of Wales Island closed on June 30 and remains closed until September 1st. An officer observed a sow bear, laying on her right side, at a broadside quartering angle towards the road with her head approximately two feet from the road edge, the bear appeared to be in rigor, with her legs extended and stiff to move, her abdomen had begun to bloat but her hair was still tight and had not begun to slip. The investigating officer believed the bear to be killed a couple days prior by gun shot wound to the head from the road.

In response to this violation, USFS LEOs collaborated with AWT, establishing a bear decoy operation in the nearby area for multiple nights. Following an unsuccessful decoy operation, an FS LEO was able to identify a suspect in the bear poaching case. The suspect was found running hounds at night, out of season, without a hunting license, without a permit to hunt with hounds plus additional violations. This case is active.

LEO's on the Yakutat Ranger District assisted USDA Forest Service and State of Alaska Fish and Game biologists with the annual federal subsistence moose hunt by conducting patrols and enforcement actions from October 7<sup>th</sup> through October 13<sup>th</sup>. LEO's issued three Violation Notices and seized the meat of one cow moose that had been illegally harvested. The meat from the illegally harvested cow moose was then distributed to a member of the Yakutat Tlingit Tribe for the purpose of conducting a traditional potlatch ceremony.

LEO's also assisted the biologists by taking hunting reports from successful hunters and relaying them back to town to ensure that the proper number of bull moose were taken for the population to remain

healthy. Additional law enforcement activity conducted during the hunt included fishing compliance checks, cabin checks and an abandoned property investigation.

Traditionally LEI emphasize a lot of deer enforcement efforts during the rut. This year officers observed what felt like an increase of effort during the federal subsistence hunt starting on July 24<sup>th</sup>. On the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> an officer made a hunting contact on state land where a hunter was glassing a clear cut. The officer explained the necessity to be on federal lands during the subsistence only hunting periods.

Also on opening day an officer observed a male and female standing on the pavement aiming a rifle at a deer in the ditch. The couple walked over to the officer, inquired how far off the road they must be to shoot, then immediately stepped off the drivable surface and harvested the deer all while they were blocking the road and had previously been standing in the middle of the road seemingly seconds from violating state law.

An officer was concerned with hunting effort in Josephine Lake within the Unit 2 closure to non-rural residents. A known Ketchikan party reserved the Josephine Lake Cabin for the week prior to the August 15<sup>th</sup> opener and departing on opening day.

Officers attempted to contact the party in question but the LE&I Beaver on amphibs floats is unable to safely land on the lake due to the terrain and the limits of the beaver making it difficult to enforce that closure.

One officer contacted a hunter just starting his day, the hunter stated he was out looking for a couple deer for his mother, when asked for his designated hunter papers the hunter was confused and didn't have the proper permits. The officer was able to educate the hunter and send him to the ranger district to get a designated hunter permit so that hopefully this hunter could provide for his family.

Additionally, in most areas, officers find discarded deer poorly salvaged, this includes bucks and does and is typically observed near the rut. An officer this year located two lactating does with their heads removed then carcasses dumped on the side of a road in his patrol area. This case is also active.

Other trends and feedback officers received in the field about subsistence hunting was that people were in the field with firearms but no license or harvest tickets. This is not a violation but raises concerns if people are hunting without licenses and or not validating harvest tickets. A lot of criticism is received for the government not limiting an overall number of households a designated hunter can hunt for. Currently a person in the field can possess up to 2 bag limits at 1 time but can return to the field in following days with 2 new permits to hunt. This has not always been a concern about population or management, some people have expressed that competition for access to certain hunting locations gets diluted and is frustrating that select people seem to spend more time in the woods than is reasonable. Other comments have uttered frustration that the designated hunting program presents challenges to state biologists who talk about the designated hunting program as a factor when considering management strategies for extending hunting seasons or limiting and restricting bag limits.

Officers on the Stikine River worked closely with biologist to provide education and monitoring for the Stikine River sockeye fishery. One issue brought up was a discrepancy between verbiage and mapping provided to subsistence users. The map shows fishing is open to side slough and back channels, but this

isn't the intent of the fishery to allow access to fish spawning grounds. This concern was shared with managers.

Subsistence fishing enforcement this year included multiple warnings and some citations to non-resident anglers. One group from out of state observed residents engaged in lawful subsistence efforts and other sportfishing methods, some residents were snagging fish in saltwater, which prompted the out of state anglers to snag further upstream, in fresh water making it illegal. The officer in this case provided education to the out of state anglers via warning notice.

Hatchery Creek Falls generates a lot of questions, the falls consist of concrete and natural rock, federal subsistence regulations state "You may not take fish for subsistence uses within 300 feet of any dam, fish ladder, weir, culvert or other artificial obstruction unless specifically authorized in these regulations." Further in the subsistence regulations for Southeastern Alaska the regulation specifies, "You may fish with a rod and reel within 300 feet of a fish ladder unless the site is posted by the U.S. Forest Service. You may not fish from, on, or in a fish ladder.

State regulations say "Fishing is allowed within 300-feet of fish ladders unless otherwise posted by department markers. No person may fish from, on, or in a fish ladder. Wildlife Troopers have cited subsistence users while federally subsistence fishing, for fishing within 300 feet of an artificial obstruction. This raises a lot of questions each year about where people can fish at Hatchery Creek Falls.

This year there were some online posts of non-residents dip-netting with their resident family and friends on the Karta River. This is a common concern, it was patrolled and investigated this year but unsubstantiated.

As a mitigation effort to clear some of these obstacles with the intent to better support the subsistence program officers should coordinate overnight patrols that include two officers on the boat. Some overtime funding for pre-planned, extended patrols would maximize efficiency and range for an increased law enforcement presence.

Access to smaller patrol vessels that can be trailered and more easily operated by single resources would also be beneficial in areas where there are multiple boat launches and high officer turn over.

Some feedback from the zone also identified aging decoys, most have suffered multiple hits in areas that are hard to repair, for example a lot of hunter's neck shoot deer, which is a soft spot on the decoys, which now look rough and unrealistic. Following a decoy operation an officer asked a hunter that blew passed the decoy why he didn't slow down when he saw the decoy, the hunter's response was, "even at 50 mph that deer looked like a decoy, and I'm not even convinced you got blacktail horns on there"

In many cases I'd encourage subsistence biologist and law enforcement to work together (when appropriate) towards a common goal, this might aid both especially when modes of transportation might be a premium.

Officers are encouraged to write and share stories of subsistence efforts to include documenting subsistence related warnings and violations in LEIRS with special coding which helps share some of our efforts in the field. This documentation is improving and will hopefully continue to improve as we engage in more dialog with program management.

